

# Syllable

Lecture 11



# The Nature of the Syllable

The syllable is an important unit in the rhythm of speech. It can be identified according to a *phonetical* or *phonological* point of view. The *phonetical* point of view is concerned with the **physical production** of sounds, whereas the *phonological* one is concerned with **abstract units within the context.**

# The Phonetical Point of View

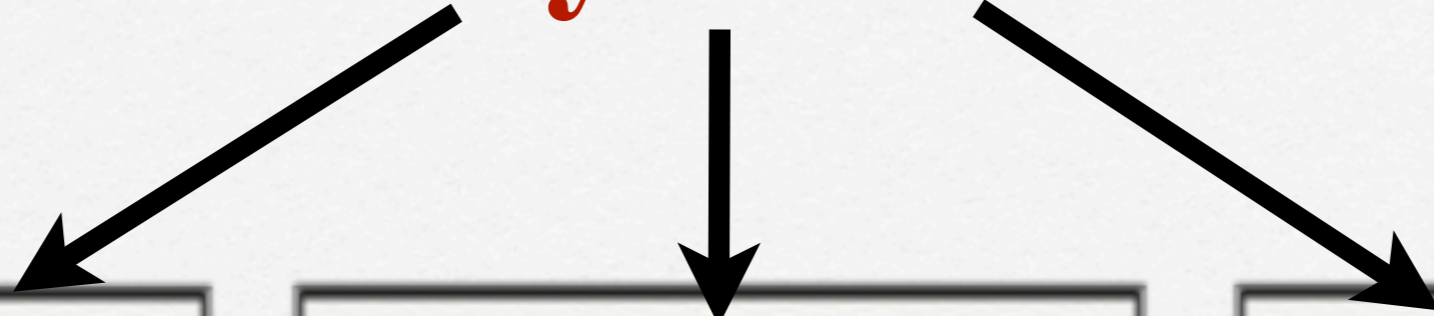
- *Phonetically*, syllables are described as consisting of a center which has little or no obstruction to airflow and which sounds comparatively loud.



## Cont.

- **Before and after this center (that is the beginning and end of the syllable), there will be great obstruction to airflow and/or less loud sound.**

# Syllable



## beginning

*greater obstruction*

*less loud sound*

## Center

*little/no obstruction*

*sound is loud*

## end

*greater obstruction*

*less loud sound*



***Phonetical* there are different types of Syllables**

**1. A Minimum Syllable: is a single vowel in isolation which is preceded and followed by silence.**

**Example:**

*are* /a:/                      *or* /ɔ:/                      *err* /ɜ:/

/m/ (agreement)                      -                      /ʃ/ (silent)

2. **Syllables with an onset only:** more than just silence preceding the center of the syllable.

**Example:**

*bar* /ba:/

*key* /ki: /

*more* /mɔ:/



**3. Syllables with a coda only: more than just  
silence following the center of the syllable.**

**Example:**

*am* /æm/

*ought* /ɔ:t/

*ease* /i:z/



### 3. Syllables with an onset & a coda:

Example:

*run* /rʌn/

*sat* /sæt/

*fill* /fiɪl/



# Syllabicity

A further phonetic property of consonants that may be transcribed is whether the consonant is *syllabic*.



# Example

There is a **phonetic** difference between the **n** of the American English *cotton* and that of *con*.

**n** of *cotton* is *syllabic* /ka?n̩/

**n** of *con* is *nonsyllabic* /kan/



## Cont.

There is no simple definition of *syllabic* consonant vs. *nonsyllabic* consonant, save that a *syllabic* consonant forms the peak of a syllable and a *nonsyllabic* consonant does not.



## Cont.

The main phonetic correlation of the distinction between *syllabic* and *nonsyllabic* consonant is **duration**, where *syllabic* consonants are generally **longer** than the *nonsyllabic* consonants.



## Cont.

A number of **sonorant** (voiced) consonants of English can be *syllabic*.

### Example:

*bottle* /bɑd**l**/  
|

*fur* /**fr**/  
|

*lesson* /lɛs**n**/  
|



- Generally, one finds *syllabic* sonorants only between consonants and the beginning or end of a word.
- Thus in English, final [r] is *nonsyllabic* when it is preceded by a vowel, as in *car* [kar],
- and [r] is *syllabic* when preceded by a consonant, as in *copper* [kɑp<sub>ɹ</sub>].



**Cont.**

**One can predict the difference between *syllabic* and *nonsyllabic* sonorant in English from surrounding segments.**



However, in normal speech American English:

- *terrain* [tərejn] is pronounced as [t<sub>r</sub>ejn] which is distinct from *train* [trejn].
- *polite* [pələjt] is pronounced as [p<sub>r</sub>ajt] which is distinct from *plight* [plajt].

*Syllabic* consonants can be predicted by a rule in English.



# ***The Phonological Point of View***

- It involves looking at the **possible combinations** of English phonemes.
- The study of the possible phoneme combinations of a language is called ***phonotactics***.



## a). Initial Position:

- **The word can begin with a vowel, or with one, two or three consonants.**
- **No word begins with more than three consonants.**



## **b). Final Position:**

- **The word can end with a vowel, or with one, two, three or four (very rare) consonants.**
- **No word ends with more than four consonants.**



# The Structure of the English Syllable

## a). Initial Position:

1. If the first syllable of the word in question is a **vowel**, this initial syllable has a **zero onset**.
2. If the syllable begins with **one consonant**, that initial consonant may be any consonant phoneme except **ʒ ; ŋ** is rare.



## a). Initial Position:

**3. Having two or more consonants together is called *consonant cluster*. Initial two-consonant clusters are of two sorts in English:**



1. Composed of **s** followed by a small set of consonants:

***s**way* /sweɪ/

***s**moke* /sməʊk/

***s**ting* /stɪŋ/

The **s** in these clusters is called **pre-initial** consonant and the other consonant (**m**, **t**, and **w**) is the **initial consonant**.



2. Begins with set of about 15 consonants,  
followed by one of the set **l, r, w, j**:

*play* /pleɪ/

*try* /traɪ/

*quick* /kwɪk/

*few* /fjuː/

We call the first consonant **initial**  
consonant and the second the **post-initial**  
consonant.



# Three-consonant initial clusters:

*split* /split/

post-initial consonant

initial consonant

*square* /skweə/

pre-initial consonant

*stream* /stri:m/



## **b). Final Position (final consonant clusters)**

- 1. Here we can have up to four consonant clusters.**
- 2. If there is no final consonant, we say that there is **zero coda**.**
- 3. When there is only **one** consonant, we call it **final consonant**.**



**Cont.**

**4. Any consonant may be a final consonant  
except h, r, w, j.**

**5. There are two sorts of two-consonant  
final clusters:**



1. Final consonant *preceded* by a **pre-final** consonant; a small set **m, n, ŋ, l, s**:

*bump* /bʌ**mp**/

*belt* /b**elt**/

*bent* /b**ent**/

*ask* /a:**sk**/

*bank* /bæ**ŋk**/



2. Final consonant *followed* by a **post-final**

**consonant**; also a small set **s, z, t, d, θ**:

*bets* /bets/

*bagged* /bægd/

*beds* /bedz/

*eighth* /eitθ/

*backed* /bækt/

These **post-final** consonants can be identified as separate morphemes.



**Cont.**

**6. There are two types of final three-  
consonant clusters:**



# Three-consonant final clusters:

## 1. pre-final + final + post-final

*helped* /helpt/

post-initial consonant

final consonant

*banks* /bæŋks/

pre-final consonant

*bonds* /bɒnds/

## 2. **final** + **post-final 1** + **post-final 2**

The **post-final 2** consonant is one of **s, z, t, d, θ**.

*fifths*

**/fifθs/**

**post-initial consonant 2**

**post-initial consonant 1**

**final consonant**

*next* **/nekst/**

*lapsed* **/læpst/**



**Cont.**

**7. a). Most four-consonant clusters can be analyzed as consisting of:**

**pre-final + final + post-final 1 + post-final 2**

**pre-final** + **final** + **post-final 1** + **post-final 2**

		<b>pre-final</b>	<b>final</b>	<b>post-final 1</b>	<b>post-final 2</b>
<b>twelfths</b>	<b>twe</b>	<b>l</b>	<b>f</b>	<b>θ</b>	<b>s</b>
<b>prompts</b>	<b>prD</b>	<b>m</b>	<b>p</b>	<b>t</b>	<b>s</b>



**Cont.**

**7. b). a small number of cases of four-consonant clusters consists of a final consonant with no pre-final one:**

**final + post-final 1 + post-final 2 + post-final 3**

**final** + post-final 1 + post-final 2 + post-final 3

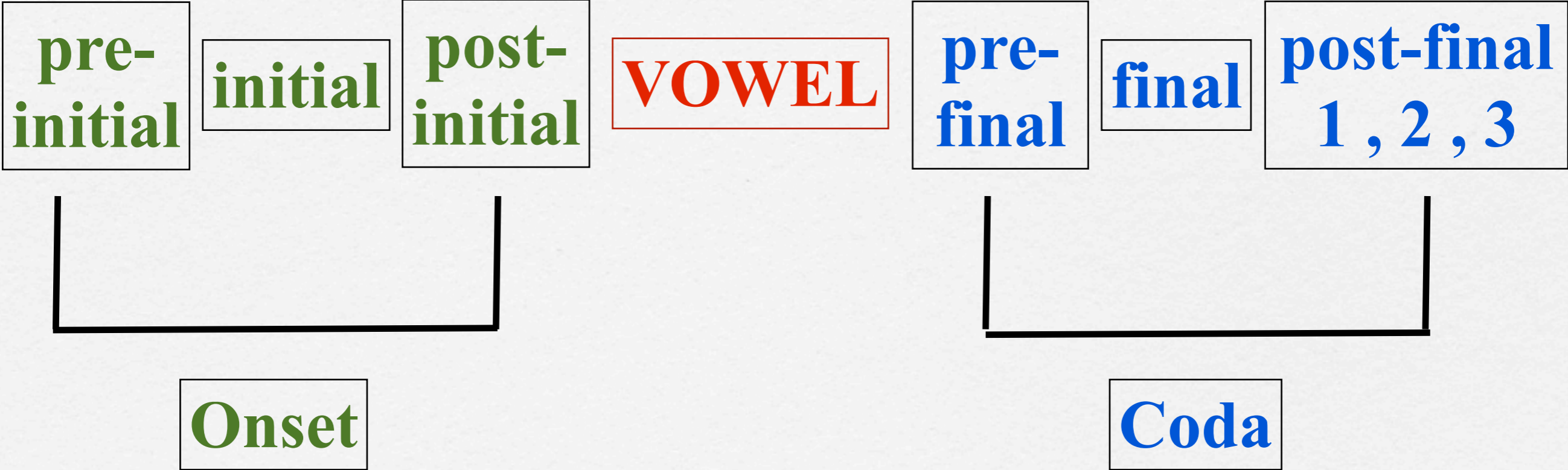
		<b>final</b>	post-final 1	post-final 2	post-final 3
<b>sixths</b>	<b>SI</b>	<b>k</b>	<b>s</b>	<b>θ</b>	<b>s</b>
<b>texts</b>	<b>te</b>	<b>k</b>	<b>s</b>	<b>t</b>	<b>s</b>



# Summary

**To sum up, we may describe the English syllable as having the following maximum phonological structure:**

# Summary





# Summary

There must be a **VOWEL** in the center of the syllable.

Example:

*stud.ents*      /stju:d.nts/

**Notice** that **dot** is used to mark a syllable.